

# Charu Balamurugan

Medicine, Health, and Society

[charu.balamurugan@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:charu.balamurugan@vanderbilt.edu)



## **Investigating mental health of incarcerated youth across axes of sexual and gender minority and racial and ethnic minority statuses**

**Introduction:** Sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth and racial and ethnic minority (REM) youth are overrepresented in carceral settings, yet few studies have investigated mental health among incarcerated SGM and REM youth. This study examined differences in mental health indicators and receipt of behavioral health care by SGM and REM statuses among incarcerated youth.

**Methods:** Cross-sectional data are from the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey administered to youth incarcerated in juvenile correctional facilities (N = 221). We categorized these youth into 4 groups: (1) non-SGM and non-REM (n = 50), (2) SGM and non-REM (n = 18), (3) Non-SGM and REM (n = 107), (4) SGM and REM (n = 46). First, descriptive statistics were used to assess prevalence differences in mental health indicators and receipt of behavioral health care across groups. Then, multivariable logistic regression models were used to assess associations among SGM and REM statuses and mental health indicators (suicidal ideation, suicide attempt, self-harm, depressive symptoms, receipt of behavioral health care) after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics and exposure to adverse childhood experiences.

**Results:** Mental health indicators varied by SGM and REM statuses. SGM and non-REM youth reported the highest prevalence of all assessed outcomes including suicidal ideation (44%), suicide attempt (50%), self-harm (61%), depressive symptoms (33%), and receipt of behavioral health care (78%) compared with all other groups. SGM and REM youth, compared with non-SGM and non-REM youth, demonstrated elevated odds of suicide ideation (adjusted odds ratio [aOR] = 2.2, 95% confidence interval [95% CI] = 0.92–5.44) and self-harm (adjusted odds ratio [aOR] = 2.25, 95% confidence interval [95% CI] = 1.02–5.06). Receipt of behavioral health care differed by SGM (p = 0.04) but not REM statuses.

**Conclusions:** Incarcerated SGM and REM youth disproportionately experience negative mental health indicators, emphasizing the need for intersectional mental health interventions.